

# **Polk County Fathers and Families Coalition Annual Report**



**January 2009**

**POLK COUNTY FATHERS AND FAMILIES COALITION**  
Dedicated to creating a community where all children grow up in strong, healthy  
relationships with their parents.

**Committee Members**

**Lester Allen** — Willkie House

**Mike Canney** — Smith Barney

**Sam Carrell** — Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Iowa

**Mike Carver** — Grubb & Ellis Mid-America Commercial Real Estate

**Mary Chapman** — Des Moines Area Community College

**Vernon Delpesce** — YMCA of Greater Des Moines

**Julie Fugenschuh** — Making Connections

**Paul Harrison** — Church of Damascus Road

**Mike Hartwig** — Iowa Family Policy Center

**Kara Hudson** — Parent

**Michael Hurst** — Community Advocate

**Sally Kreamer** — Fifth Judicial District

**Ed Nichols** — Community Advocate

**Scott Raecker** — Character Counts

**Sarai Rice** — Des Moines Area Religious Council

**Greg Robinson** — Urbandale Community School District

**Jeff Schultz** — Fifth Judicial District

**Tamara Scott** — Parent

**Georgia Sheriff** — Drake University Head Start

**Heather Soener** — Young Women's Resource Center

**Elaine Szymoniak** — Community Advocate

**Margaret Wright** — Human Services

# Polk County Fathers and Families Coalition

## History

The Polk County Fathers and Families Coalition – a group of volunteers representing business, faith and community based organizations, human service agencies, corrections and Head Start – was formed in 2003 to explore ways state and local agencies, advocates and policy makers could contribute to the improvement of fatherhood-related outcomes for Iowa's children.

### **Mission Statement:**

Create a community where all children grow up in strong, healthy relationships with their parents.

The mission of the Coalition is based on the following guiding principles: children, fathers, mothers and communities all reap benefits of responsible fatherhood regardless of marital status; children thrive when both parents are actively and positively involved in their lives; and healthy, stable, safe, and strong families result when communities at all levels – individuals, schools, business, employers, the media, community groups, the faith community and government – all understand and demonstrate father inclusive and family friendly approaches to their everyday activities.

Trends impacting children and family life over the past 50 years have included: households with children without a father present have increased substantially; the importance of marriage has declined while the rate of divorce has increased; there has been a significant increase in the number of fathers that have been incarcerated; there have been significant increases in resources for mothers (i.e. programs such as: Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies; Women, Infants and Children – WIC; Maternal & Child Health) with no increase in resources for fathers; the numbers of children born out of wedlock have grown substantially; domestic violence has increased often coupled with alcohol and chemical abuse; suicide rates have also risen; child support cases have skyrocketed; the need for foster care is a growing challenge to state human services providers; and school dropout rates and student achievement levels have moved in the wrong direction.

### **Impact on Children Because of the Lack of Father Involvement:**

- 90% of all homeless and runaway children come from fatherless homes
- 75% of all adolescents in chemical abuse centers come from fatherless homes
- 72% of adolescent murderers grew up without fathers
- 71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes
- 63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes

Key objectives adopted by the Coalition include: raise awareness about fatherhood and the impact that the crisis of fatherlessness is having on our community; share information and stimulate ideas about changes that individuals and organizations can make in their programs or practice; and raise awareness about available resources, including the faith community and identify gaps in services and resources.

## Fatherhood Initiative Overview

With grant funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the support of the YMCA of Greater Des Moines, the Fatherhood Initiative was launched with the hiring of a full-time coordinator/case manager in February 2007.

The goal of the Fatherhood Initiative is to assist fathers to remain connected with their children and to link fathers in our community with the support they need. A centralized location and office was established for the coordinator at the John R. Grubb YMCA.

The following plan for the Fatherhood Initiative was adopted: each father would receive case management services that will assess his current situation and needs; each father will be directed to the appropriate services in the community to address his needs (i.e. job training or placement, mentoring, health care, education, financial literacy); the fathers will participate in a weekly program with an established curriculum related to the roles and responsibilities of fatherhood; and family reunification activities and counseling will be provided.

Once a core source of referrals from the corrections system was established the Fatherhood Initiative has branched out and is exploring other referral avenues. This includes Visiting Nurse Services (VNS) in an effort to provide more early intervention to increase parental involvement and avoid accumulation of child support debt. Through collaboration, grant funds from Polk County Decategorization/Human Services were received to serve 50 men referred from VNS. Outreach is also being made to young fathers through area high schools. The Fatherhood Initiative is holding group meetings and interacting with young fathers in SCAVO (the Des Moines alternative high school) as well as at Des Moines North High School.

The Fatherhood Initiative is also listed on the Iowa 2-1-1 (general information) website that has generated over a hundred calls from dads requesting information related to legal issues, paternity establishment, custody and visitation, child support information, as well as counseling, housing, jobs, and even questions such as “How do I get a stroller?” Because of the connection the Fatherhood Initiative has with child support recovery, numerous fathers have been able to obtain more realistic child

### Key Objectives

#### Changing Family Outcomes

- Fathers will be actively involved in their children's lives
- Fathers will improve their employment status to better support their children financially
- Fathers will co-parent more effectively with the child's mother
- Children will have a safe and stable home life, improved health care, school readiness, and age-appropriate child development services

#### Changing the System

- Fathers will learn how and where to access resources in Polk County
- Service providers will adapt programs and services to include and better serve fathers
- Community awareness and funding will ensure sustainable, permanent programming
- Services needed for fatherless children will decrease over time

support obligations by modifying their orders or by explaining to a judge their change in circumstances. For example, several fathers were paying child support to the mother even though the child was living with him.

The Fatherhood Initiative is using the “Responsible Fatherhood Project Participant Management Information System” for collecting and reporting data. The management information system includes tools for intake and assessment, participant service needs, change in service needs and case closing and a follow up interview. Iowa State University and Child Support Recovery are assisting with program evaluation.

### **Project Status/Progress to Date**

Initially the coordinator tried contacting men just entering the child support system. The proposed approach was based on the concept that early intervention when a new child support case is opened would improve communication and relationships, improve payment of support, reduce or avoid debt and increase the father’s involvement with the child. Hundreds of letters and numerous phone calls were made to men inviting them to participate in the Fatherhood Initiative. There was no response; perhaps because their case was so new they had other priorities, the men did not see a need for support, or they did not trust us and we were unknown to them.

The coordinator continued with community awareness about fatherhood and promoting parental involvement with their children. Through collaboration between Child Support Recovery (CSR), Making Connections and the Department of Corrections men reentering the Making Connections community after incarceration were identified and offered child support incentives (see Attachment A) to participate in the Fatherhood Initiative.

On-going weekly classes using the 12-week 24/7 Dad Curriculum are focusing on parental responsibility including: health and nutrition, positive communication, being a positive role model, co-parenting, financial education, and community supports. Case management services are also offered to provide guidance through the local service delivery systems. Assistance is provided in identification of barriers that may include: work and

### **Types of Outcome Data To Be Gathered**

- % Reporting full-time employment
- % Improving employment status
- % Reporting paying child support in full every month
- % Reporting they see their children more often (including frequency and reasons)
- % Reporting having more say in making major decisions (like education, health, religion) about their child
- % Reporting not having or expecting to have additional children
- % Having reduced arrears/child support debt

**Enrollment (March 2007 – July 2008)**  
92 men initiated enrollment  
62 completed intake

**Snapshot of Men Who Completed Intake (March 2007 – July 2008)**  
≈ \$1.5 million owed in child support for 119 kids  
Average debt over \$35,000  
Average earnings \$10/hour



employment, alcohol and drug abuse, physical and mental health issues, domestic violence, housing, and training/skill levels, and in identifying solutions.

In July of 2007, an Open House was held to expose fathers to the various resources available. Fathers were invited to meet with representatives from financial counseling services, Child Support Recovery, and the Des Moines Area Community College Urban Campus.

As of June 2008, 31 men have graduated from the Fatherhood Initiative. Full follow-up interviews have been completed on 11 of the graduates. The men ranged in age from 26 to 43 and had an average of 2.7 children each. Nearly three quarters of the fathers (71%) reported living with their children – an increase from 60% at intake into the program. One third of those were expecting another child; all expectant fathers reported they would sign a paternity affidavit at the child's birth to establish of paternity. None of the men had children living in foster care or with relatives – all of the children either lived with them or with the biological mother. They reported 100% satisfaction with the program helping them: understand child support, understand their legal rights and responsibilities, group support, and that the program was beneficial and gave them hope for the future.

In July 2008, a part-time staff person was added to assist with case management, facilitating the weekly classes, and on-going outreach efforts.

In summary, the initial program evaluation shows child support collections from participants have increased and communication with the child support office has improved. Fathers completing the program also reported improvement in three areas: communication with the mother; opportunities for being involved with their children; and co-parenting and parenting skills.

#### **Initial Outcomes (33% of graduates interviewed)\***

- 100% were employed
- 80% employed full time or more (only 20% employed full time at intake)
- 100% paying current child support
- 33% reported seeing their children more often

\* Efforts to reach all graduates for evaluation purposes is continuing

#### **Child Support Outcomes**

Amount of Child Support Paid by Graduates Since Enrollment = \$89,208;  
Average per Case = \$1,512 (As of August 15, 2008)

Average Monthly Payments Increased by 79.8% or \$62.00 a month\*

Average monthly payment made for the 6 months prior to enrollment = \$77.70

Average monthly payment made for the 6 months following enrollment = \$139.70

\* Payment history of 29 graduates as of June 2008 for the six months prior to enrollment as compared with the six months following enrollment



## **Fatherhood Initiative Sponsors**

Annie E. Casey Foundation  
Polk County Community Development Grant  
Prairie Meadows Grant  
Mid-America Commercial Real Estate  
Principal Financial Group Foundation  
EMC Insurance Companies  
Mid-America Group  
Wells Fargo  
West Bancorporation Foundation, Inc.  
Greater Des Moines Community Foundation  
Polk County Decategorization – Iowa Department of Human Services

## **Fatherhood Initiative Financial Information**

The YMCA of Greater Des Moines serves as the fiscal agent for the Fatherhood Initiative. The following is a brief summary of the finances of the project since its launch in February 2007.

Operating Support		
Grants from Sponsors	\$69,840	
Individual Contributions	\$25,918	
Polk County Community Development Grant	\$25,000	
In-kind receipts	\$23,000	
Decategorization Conference Grant	\$20,000	
Decategorization Services Grant	\$28,437	
Total Support		\$192,195
Expenses		
Personnel	\$137,746	
Operating Costs	\$8,840	
Client Services/Incentives	\$1,103	
Total Expenses		\$147,689
Balance – December 31, 2008		\$44,506

## Vision for the Future

The Polk County Fathers and Families Coalition plans to build upon the Fatherhood Initiative through a three-pronged approach:

- 1) Public Awareness  
Promote activities that increase public awareness about the importance of fatherhood inclusion and building strong, healthy families;
- 2) Community Partnerships  
Develop community partnerships around fatherhood and relationship enhancement; and
- 3) Case Management/Direct Services to Fathers  
Continue to offer and expand case management and direct services to fathers that promote responsibility and inclusion in the family through the partnership with the YMCA of Greater Des Moines.

Our 2009 work plan and targeted activities are based on the following key objectives:

- ⇒ Fathers will be actively involved in their children's lives to better support their children emotionally and socially.
- ⇒ Fathers will improve their employment status to better support their children financially.
- ⇒ Fathers will co-parent more effectively with their child's mother.
- ⇒ Children will have a safe and stable home life, improved health care, and age-appropriate child development services.
- ⇒ Fathers will learn how and where to access resources in Polk County.
- ⇒ Service providers will include and better serve fathers in their programs.
- ⇒ Community awareness and funding will ensure sustainable, permanent programming.
- ⇒ Services needed for fatherless children will decrease over time.



**Goal 1:****Public Awareness**

**Promote activities that increase awareness and support the mission of the Coalition – to create a community where all children grow up in strong, healthy relationships with both their parents.**

*Major Areas of Action to Continue*

- ✓ Annual fatherhood conference to share information and successes of organizations and businesses, and to facilitate strategic planning and community-wide implementation of policies and practices that strengthen healthy relationships and fatherhood involvement
- ✓ Participation in community activities, such as Kidsfest, that promote fatherhood and healthy outcomes for children
- ✓ Education through provision of written materials
- ✓ Work with local YMCA branches to expand father friendly activities and programs

*Target Activities*

- ❑ Sponsor a Father-Daughter Valentine's Day Dance
- ❑ Produce a video to promote awareness about the importance of fathers
- ❑ Initiate a media campaign to promote fatherhood including use of public service announcements
- ❑ Develop a menu of workshops, presentations and lunch & learn topics with speakers that could be utilized by area speakers bureaus
- ❑ Establish and maintain a fatherhood website through the YMCA
- ❑ Network with area news media to promote awareness about fatherhood and healthy relationships
- ❑ Outreach to area civic organizations (Parent Teacher Organizations, Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, Jr. League, Knights of Columbus, Veterans of Foreign Wars)
- ❑ Sponsor a Community Fatherhood Forum

*Key Measures*

- Have one to two newspaper stories published about the work of the Fatherhood Initiative
- Provide presentations on fatherhood to at least 10 civic organizations
- Have 200 attendees at the Father-Daughter Valentine's Day Dance
- Distribute and use the fatherhood awareness video in at least 10 faith-based and community-based organizations by Father's Day 2009
- Reach at least 2,000 families through participation in community events to promote healthy outcomes for children by active parental involvement
- Provide at least two workshops on family-friendly and father-friendly work environments to local businesses and organizations
- Increase overall awareness throughout the community about the importance of fathers
- Expand community-based activities and services offered to fathers

**Goal 2:****Community Partnerships**

**Develop partnerships by working with community organizations, businesses, social service agencies and faith-based groups to include fatherhood and relationship enhancement activities, promote father-friendly policies/practices, and support the long-term sustainability of the Fatherhood Initiative.**

*Major Areas of Action to Continue*

- ✓ Partnership with social service agencies including: Visiting Nurse Services and Children and Families of Iowa
- ✓ Partnership with state-based agencies including: Child Support Recovery, Child Welfare, Education and Corrections
- ✓ Partnership with corporate leaders and funders including: Principal Financial, Wells Fargo, Hy-Vee, Prairie Meadows, Mid American Commercial Real Estate, EMC Insurance, and West Bank
- ✓ Partnership with Polk County and the Community Development Grant
- ✓ Partnership with United Way

*Target Activities*

- ❑ Connect with faith-based agencies including: Catholic Charities, Lutheran Family Service of Iowa, Des Moines Area Religious Council, Bridges of Iowa, and Re-Entry Transitional Living (Hansen House, Harbor of Hope, etc.)
- ❑ Develop an inter-faith template to provide guidance to faith-based organizations on ways to support responsible fatherhood
- ❑ Conduct a community-wide gathering to roll out the inter-faith template
- ❑ Partner with a community leader(s) to serve as an ambassador for the Fatherhood Initiative
- ❑ Promote awareness in the early childhood community (including partnerships with agencies such as Head Start and Maternal and Child Health)
- ❑ Distribute brochures and available information in at least six to ten major service agencies
- ❑ Connect with and leverage employment and education services (including expansion of partnerships with ISU Extension, Des Moines Area Community College – DMACC, and other formal and informal education and training organizations) to assist those with multiple barriers to employment
- ❑ Recognize two or three local companies that provide family and father friendly work environments

*Key Measures*

- Offer three to five lunch-and-learns at area businesses
- Receive 25 referrals from Visiting Nurse Services
- Receive 25 referrals from Bridges of Iowa
- Make the Fatherhood Initiative a well-known resource and program among other social service agencies
- Foster relationships with the corporate community to sustain the Fatherhood Initiative through increased support

**Goal 3:****Case Management/Direct Services to Fathers**

**Continue to reach out to inner-city fathers by providing case management and direct services, including in-school programming for teen dads, to assist them in becoming responsible parents so that better outcomes for their children are achieved.**

**Major Areas of Action to Continue**

- ✓ Weekly fatherhood class at John R. Grubb YMCA
- ✓ Fatherhood program services (weekly classes for teen dads) at Scavo and North High Schools
- ✓ Services to families through “Every Sunday is Father’s Day” activities at John R. Grubb YMCA
- ✓ Fatherhood services listing on 2-1-1 website and directory
- ✓ Consulting and counseling services for phone calls resulting from 2-1-1 contacts requesting fatherhood resources
- ✓ Data and evaluation services with Iowa State University for reporting results

**Target Activities**

- ❑ Start a new weekly fatherhood class at Bridges of Iowa
- ❑ Start new fatherhood programs at area high schools (East, Roosevelt, Hoover, and S.E. Polk)
- ❑ Offer one additional weekly class time for fathers at John R. Grubb YMCA
- ❑ Develop a father-to-father mentoring program
- ❑ Develop a menu of activities and opportunities for volunteers
- ❑ Provide legal information resources to fathers
- ❑ Connect with and leverage employment and education services

**Key Measures**

- Graduate at least 100 men from the weekly fatherhood classes
- Increase presence in high schools from two to four schools
- Help fathers feel more connected with their children – at least 30% of the non-custodial program participants will report seeing their children more often
- Help fathers improve their relationship with the mother of their children – at least 30% of the non-custodial participants in the fatherhood program will report better co-parenting and communication skills
- Help fathers improve their employment status - at least 40% of the fatherhood program participants will report full-time employment
- Help fathers to better support their children financially - at least 50% of the non-custodial fathers in the fatherhood program will have made some type of contribution/payment of child support during their participation

## Attachment A - Incentives

There were two primary resources or child support incentives offered to the Fatherhood Initiative participants.

The first was a reduction (up to 80%) in their overall child support debt owed to the state, as long as they met eligibility and some specific expectations. A debt to the state can occur when the custodial parent is on public assistance (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families – TANF). Any debt owed to the mother remains payable and cannot be forgiven with this incentive. The expectations were that the participants meet once a week for 12 weeks and complete involvement in the Fatherhood program; and that they make their expected monthly payments continuously to child support recovery over the next two years. There were two benchmarks put in place to make the incentive more immediate. After six months of continuous payments they received 15% off of their debt owed to the state, and after 12 months they would receive another 35% reduction. After completion of two years they will receive an additional 80% off the remaining balance owed to the state.

### As of August 15, 2008:

42 men have graduated from the program; 22 have already met the first benchmark and have received a 15% reduction in the child support owed to the state

The second incentive offered was to reduce the maximum amount of net pay withheld for child support for no more than 12 months. Currently, the maximum amount an employer can withhold for child support is 50% of the payor's net pay. This incentive reduces the withholding to 25% if their income is insufficient to pay the full court-ordered amount of support. This allows the participant more money for other expenses while taking steps to achieve an income level needed to pay their support and keep up with other expenses.

These child support financial incentives are not currently available because of time-limited pilot project restrictions. The Initiative is exploring the barriers and needs of the fathers and developing and implementing other incentives, including: free Y memberships for the men and their children, bus fares, free participation in Y activities, a free parenting class focused on male issues, and scholarship opportunities for their children for after-school care and sports programming.